

Preparing Your Child for Adolescence

“Enjoy ‘em now, because they’ll drive you crazy when they’re teenagers!” That’s the warning parents of pre-teens often hear. Obviously, you and your pre-teen are in for a lot of change, but turmoil isn’t inevitable. You have the opportunity - before the transition from childhood to adulthood begins - to intentionally navigate your son or daughter through that change in a proactive and positive way.

The best way to prepare your child for adolescence is for you to set the stage by spending time together dedicated to giving your preadolescent the framework for what’s coming. The hope is that you - the parent - will explain what it means and how to make the most of this vital time in life. Here’s a quick guide to the when, what, and how of that time together:

When

Often parents are concerned that they will overwhelm their pre-teen or encourage premature curiosity if they jump the gun in preparing them for adolescence. A greater concern, however, is the likelihood that someone else will beat you to it. Children are typically ready before their parents are. Doctors report puberty starting as early as age 9 among some girls, and the average age for first exposure to pornography among boys is around the same age. Of course, not all children are the same. That is why it’s important to spend time with your pre-teen, getting a sense of where they are developmentally and to make the timing of your conversations a matter of prayer. Generally, your prime opportunity will fall somewhere between the ages of 9 and 12.

What

In your conversation about the years ahead, you should plan to address the many areas of change your son or daughter will encounter during their transition to adulthood - in their body, their decision-making, and their relationship with you.

Body: It’s important to frame the physical changes ahead as much more than a plea for sexual abstinence. Your child needs a vision for how the internal and external changes ahead are preparing them for the joys of marriage and the miracle of creating new life.

Decision-making: Increasingly, your child will have to make and assume the responsibilities for his or her decisions. As you maintain your overall family values in media choices, individual responsibilities (chores, homework, etc.) and alcohol/drug use, you also need to direct your son or daughter in how to make good decisions for themselves. The first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs can be a helpful guide for learning to discern between wisdom and folly.

Relationship to You: Helping your son or daughter understand and embrace the changes in his or her body while challenging them to bear the responsibility of decision making will be different from the role you’ve played before. Explain to your pre-teen that over the next decade your role will be progressively changing to that of a coach who is there to guide them in their transition into independent development.

How

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Schedule It:** Set aside a special time or trip with your child to go through one of the recommended resources for joint discussion. Think about how to create an environment for open communication for your child to share, talk and discuss with you.
- **Prepare For It:** Listen to the audio titled *The Talk* included with the **Faith Path: Preparing for Adolescence** kit for examples of what to say.
- **Dialogue:** Don’t do all the talking. Allow your child to share thoughts and questions without being judgmental or quick to give a lecture.
- **Have Fun:** Your child is much more likely to listen and be open with you if you have established a good relationship by creating fun times

GOING FURTHER - Resources

Preparing for Adolescence (by Dr. James Dobson) is the classic Christian resource for this transition.

Raising a Modern Day Knight (by Robert Lewis) focuses on fathers preparing their sons for manhood.

Passport to Purity Kit (by Dennis and Barbara Rainey) provides tools for a meaningful getaway in which parents discuss puberty, sex and other “preparing for adolescence” issues with a son or daughter.

FamilyLife.com provides suggestions for parents to help their children win at purity. (Type ‘sex education’ in search field).

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